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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 003303

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SUBJECT: UNDERSECRETARY BURNS' MEETING WITH FM LAVROV:  
US-RUSSIA RELATIONS, POST-START, MISSILE DEFENSE, GEORGIA,  
NAGORNO-KARABAKH, TRANSNISTRIA, MEPP, EL ZAHABI

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Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

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sites, Lavrov suggested, but perhaps could come and go in shifts, as long as there would be a Russian presence around the clock. But the Poles and Czechs continued to tell Moscow that Russian officers would need to be invited and to request and receive permission to enter the sites. He added that he still did not fully understand the concept of reciprocity.

15. (C) Lavrov said Russia wanted to continue the discussions with U/S Rood, but did not think it was possible to complete the interagency review and consultations by the first week of December, as Washington had proposed. The second or third week of December would be better, Lavrov said, but stressed that Moscow wanted to meet before the end of the year. The MFA would prepare some additional papers for the U.S. prior to the meeting, he added.

16. (C) U/S Burns agreed it was important to continue the discussions on MD and post-START before the end of the year. Medvedev's statement had sent the wrong message to the President-elect, he noted, but this also emphasized how important it was to reconstitute a serious strategic dialogue between the U.S. and Russia. He expressed the hope that the tone of Russia's messages could emphasize the areas where we could work together constructively. The sharp and increasingly negative tone of Russian rhetoric was counterproductive, especially as the U.S. was going through a transition to a new Administration.

Resume Economic Dialogue

17. (C) Lavrov said Russia wanted more economic cooperation with the U.S. It was unfortunate that the events in the Caucasus had led to the cancellation of the dialogue between U/S Jeffery and First Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov. He asked if the two could meet before January 20. He added that while the dialogue between the two was a useful tool, it was not clear that a first deputy FM had enough leverage. We might want to consider a higher-level dialogue, something

like Gore-Chernomyrdin. There should also be a separate business-to-business dialogue, without government representation, but with the government aware of what was being discussed. Lavrov also said he had been surprised by Japan's postponement of G8 meetings and hoped they could be rescheduled soon.

¶18. (C) Burns said Jeffery would try to call or to talk to Denisov on the margins of the G20 meeting in Washington and propose that the two look for a date to meet. The Jeffery-Denisov dialogue mechanism was useful in light of the global financial crisis. It was important to have structural dialogues on economic, as well as security, issues. He noted there was not much time before the end of the Japanese chairmanship to reschedule G8 meetings, but said the U.S. was not opposed to going forward with areas such as the Lyon Process meetings, non-proliferation, and energy efficiency.

Georgia: Perevi, Abkhazia, November 18 Meeting  
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¶19. (C) Noting that there was not much to add to the discussion between the Secretary and Lavrov on Georgia in Sharm-el-Sheikh the previous weekend, U/S Burns stressed the importance of keeping the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia stable, and for Russia to protect the civilian population in the two enclaves.

¶10. (C) Lavrov said Russia was trying to protect the populace. Moscow was concerned about increased tensions in the town of Perevi. The border had "run down the middle of the town," and Russia had had a checkpoint on the South Ossetian side. But when, several days before, groups living there "rearranged the border," Russian troops had withdrawn. But the tensions there had risen, and so, Lavrov said, he had instructed Defense Minister Serdyukov to send approximately 30 troops back in to the checkpoint to supervise the South Ossetian side. Russia was also working to prevent ethnic clashes, but the situation required vigilance on both sides of the border.

¶11. (C) In Abkhazia, the Georgians were "still active," Lavrov contended. Some "unrecognized" groups kept trying to get into the Russian outpost. Saying all the Georgians who

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had wanted to leave the enclave had already left, Lavrov acknowledged it would be difficult for those who wanted to go back, and it would take time. But, he insisted, Russia would be willing to assist them when they did.

¶12. (C) Lavrov said he had urged the French to focus on substance at the November 18 meeting in Geneva. If the participants were hung up on questions of format, or issues like nameplates and badges, it could fall apart like the October 15 meeting. He noted that French negotiator Morel would travel to Moscow after the EU-Russia Summit in Nice on November 14. He said it was "too bad" that former Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Vashadze had become Minister of Culture as Russia had been able to work with him. But it might be useful to arrange some cultural exchanges between the two sides.

Nagorno-Karabakh: Encouraging Signs, but Obstacles Remain  
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¶13. (C) In response to U/S Burns' question, Lavrov said there had been "encouraging signs" during the meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents in Moscow the previous week, but no breakthroughs on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). The fact that they had met and signed a joint declaration had sent a good "political signal," but, Lavrov noted, it had not been easy getting agreement on the declaration. The main stumbling block was still Armenia's insistence that the Lachin Corridor have the same status as NK. Azerbaijan's reluctance to include any reference to the Madrid principles

had also made it difficult to reach agreement on the declaration. Still, he said, it was important for the two Presidents to say that they would continue to meet and to instruct their Foreign Ministers to meet. Lavrov added that the Armenian and Azerbaijani Ambassadors to Moscow, both former Ministers of Culture would do a joint visit to Baku, Yerevan and Nagorno-Karabakh.

#### Transnistria

¶14. (C) The Transnistria issue was much more difficult than NK, Lavrov said. Russia had again tried to use Medvedev's office to restart a dialogue, but Smirnov had undermined the effort by refusing to let Voronin travel to his native village. Lavrov stressed that, as with NK, Russia and the U.S. needed to "act in synch." Moscow was not doing anything out of line with the "5-plus-2" process, he claimed, but was concerned when it heard European envoys saying an EU role would "prevent too much Russian influence," or a NATO official remarking that NATO needed to think about ways to stop Russian actions, and to get NATO involved. "We're not looking for credit," he said, and this "should not be seen as a fight for territory."

#### MEPP

¶15. (C) Lavrov said the meeting in Sharm-el-Sheikh had been "not bad." It had reinforced all the parties' desire to keep the framework going. Livni had been confident she would become Prime Minister and Abbas had committed to continuing negotiations. Russia wanted to help Egypt prevent Hamas from blocking progress until January, when Abbas' mandate expired. The GOR had sent a "strong message" to Hamas saying it supported Egypt's proposal and urging Hamas to abide by its commitment to work constructively.

#### El Zahabi: Acquiescence

¶16. (C) U/S Burns said he hoped the U.S. and Russia were close to finalizing the transfer of Mohamed Kamal El Zahabi to Russia. He thanked the Minister for Russia's assurances that El Zahabi would not be held in detention in Chechnya, and that while he was in Russian detention, the USG would have physical access to him. Lavrov nodded, and said "yes, I think we acted expeditiously on this issue." Post will follow up to get a cover letter from MFA North America Director Neverov enclosing the assurance letters previously provided.  
BEYRLE